

## Reflective Essay

Public school closures are a widespread phenomenon across the United States. In our research group, one member works at a school that is closing this year, while another member's school previously closed and reopened as a charter. All members were interested in understanding school closures and the communities that are most impacted. We decided to focus our project on comparing justifications and impacts across financial, social and academic aspects of school closures. However, through our research we discovered there was minimal work done in the literature on stakeholder perspectives. Therefore, our research questions shifted from "What are the academic, financial and social justifications and impacts of school closures?" to "How are school closures justified by different stakeholders?" and "What other impacts and externalities do school closures cause?" We wanted to elevate the marginalized and unheard voices in school closures, specifically students, parents and teachers.

We were able to conduct an extensive literature review as well as two case studies. We met as a group 3-4 times a month to plan research, write, and review our work. We worked independently, then collaborated on reviewing each other's work, and met once a month with our professor to best understand expectations and incorporate feedback. Additionally, we utilized LMU's library resources with the education librarian liaison's guidance. In finishing our literature review, we condensed material to what was most applicable.

The literature review portion was primarily conducted through the education research database, ERIC. In addition to searching for school closures, often used multiple key words for a topic, omitted certain words (ie. COVID) and included other key terms such as 'class sizes', 'transportation costs', etc., to get a more complete picture. We also relied on digging through the references of studies to identify prominent articles. For our case studies, we were challenged

when reviewing newspaper articles. The newspaper database used in our study had an ineffective search function, so we read through every article in a specific date range with the “school” as the keyword.

ERIC helped us establish the foundation for our research project. We sorted previous research by year and found the most recent and relevant studies first. Combining terms supported us in finding the academic, social, and financial categories to focus on. In addition we used the bibliographies from the studies we read to see the scope of the literature and what studies were most prominently cited. It also helped us respond to the research that has been done, because we had a better picture of how different parts of the literature relate to each other. For the quantitative section, we used the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to look at school closure demographics because we noticed many of the studies we read used NCES data. We used NCES to generate tables to compare school closures of public versus charter schools.

Through this project we evaluated extensive information relating to school closures. We found different studies disagreed, however neither appeared exclusively correct. Rather, studies could complement each other to make a holistic picture. For example, some studies quantified cost savings of school closures while others identified reasons districts struggled to offload school sites. From this, we argued there is high variability in financial benefits dependent on circumstances. The focus of our study was to identify externalities to school closure processes and how different groups respond to them. We mostly took people at their word in that it is not our place to assume people are lying about their interests, feelings or how they were impacted. However, it was remarkable how different the realities and perspectives of students, parents, teachers and administrators are. Often, what people say out loud is sufficiently interesting to build an argument. Overall, we learned that while we can plan for a research project, we must be

open to adapt the project to the information we have access to. We intended for more of our work to be quantitative, but realized we could get a richer set of information by mixing our methods of data collection to conduct interviews and review documents. We saw that there's more opportunity for adding information to the world through qualitative work than quantitative work.